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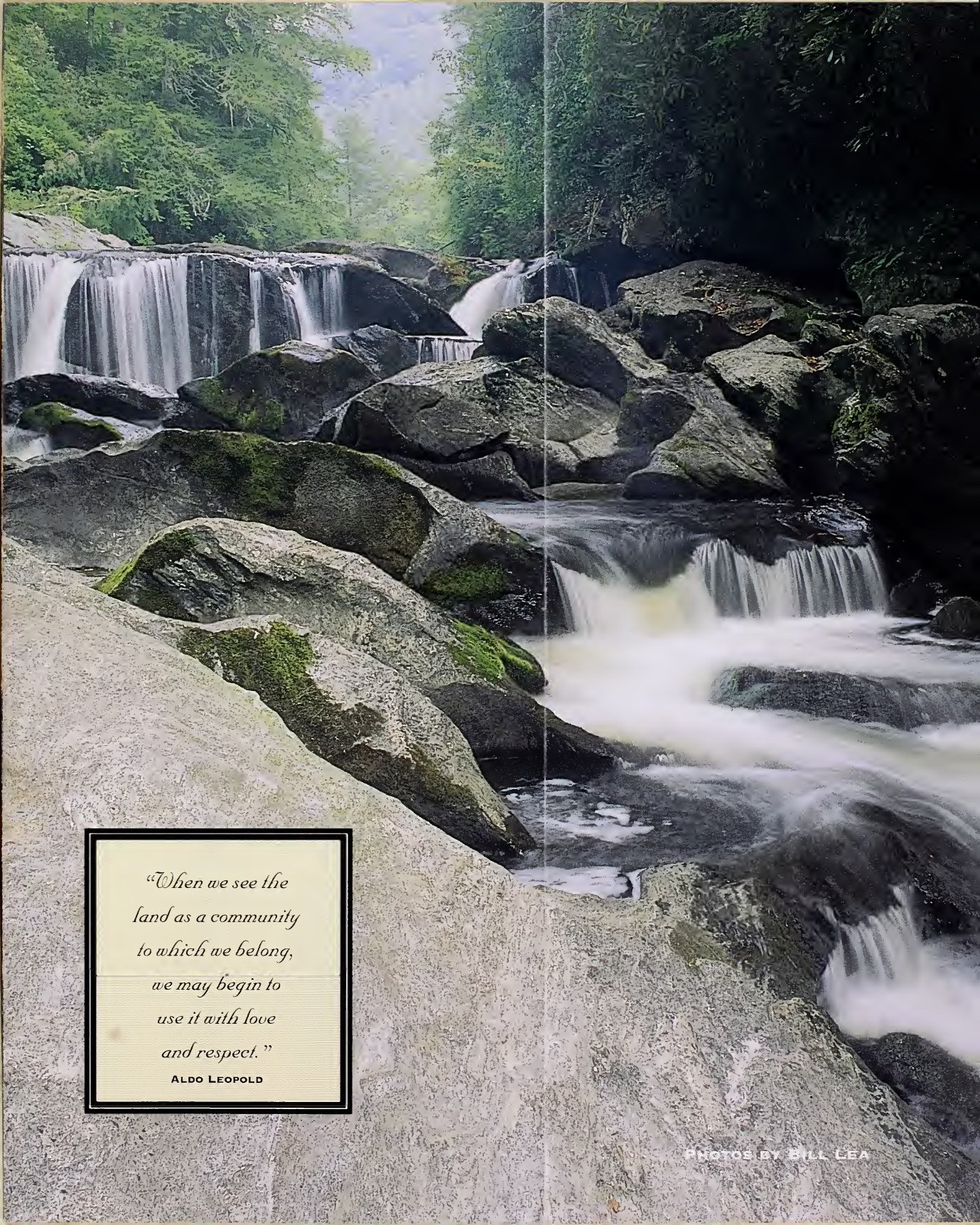
The Chattooga River Project

United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service Southern Region

A Model for Managing National Forests



"When we see the land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

ALDO LEOPOLD

PHOTOS BY BILL LEA

The Chattooga River Basin: The Perfect Setting

New on the horizons of national forest management is a method called "ecosystem management." The Forest Service wants to test these methods on the ground, on national forest land. Our selection — 120,000 acres of national forest land within the Chattooga River basin: haven for more than 200 sensitive, threatened, or endangered animals and plants; lure for thousands of whitewater sports enthusiasts; home for 57 miles of the wild and scenic Chattooga River; hunting ground for wild turkey and deer; and source of high-quality timber for local mills and furniture companies.

The Chattooga basin ranges from 900 to 4,800 feet in elevation, making it a mecca for scientists who wish to study a variety of ecosystems connected on one landscape. Crossing boundaries of three States — Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina — and three national forests — the Chattahoochee, Nantahala, and Sumter — the basin provides the perfect setting for the Forest Service to showcase its newly-adopted land ethic, "ecosystem management."

What is "Ecosystem Management"?

Ecosystem management is a new approach to the way the Forest Service cares for our national forests. This approach is aimed at meeting society's demands for forests that are not only useful and productive but diverse, healthy, and beautiful.

Central to this approach is a view of forests as a complex system made up of plants, animals, soil, water, nutrients, and air. Humans are a big piece of this puzzle, because people have made and continue to make a great impact on the forest environment.

By acknowledging that all people are members of ecosystems, we hope to fulfill the vision expressed by Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac*:

"When we see the land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

The Forest Service will demonstrate this ecosystem management approach in a pioneer project within the Chattooga basin.

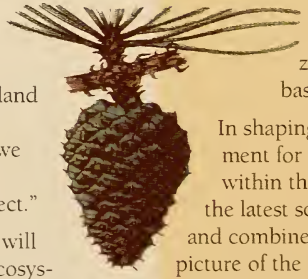
What are the Project's Goals?

This project will offer land managers state-of-the-art information and tools to accomplish the following goals:

- Work with the public on reaching a shared vision on how to manage the Chattooga basin.
- Integrate natural resource management across State boundaries, using a more consistent approach to planning.
- Meet public demands for forest uses within the context of sustaining diverse, healthy, and beautiful forests.
- Collaborate with researchers on new ways to manage the resource and test the success of these new ideas.

We Need Your Help

You can participate in this unique project by giving us your comments on what you want and expect from the lands within the Chattooga River basin. Your comments will help us gain a better understanding of what citizens value in the basin.



In shaping future management for national forest land within the basin, we will use the latest scientific information and combine it with an accurate picture of the public's expectations for these lands. To identify the basin's desired conditions, we are working with Duke University and developing a public involve-

ment plan. This plan includes person-to-person contacts, small group meetings, news releases, and newsletters. You can offer your input through one of these mediums.

Making the best decisions on managing the Chattooga River basin involves combining our best science with agreed-upon public values. Determining a desired condition for this watershed is an important step in sustaining the basin's values and uses. We need to hear what you think these national forests should provide today — and in the future.

Integrating Management Across the Landscape

To gain a better understanding of ecological relationships in the Chattooga basin, we are developing a new system for classifying land. Using modern computer technology, land managers can use maps that integrate the forest's soils, geology, climate, topography, and vegetation. This technology is a computerized mapping and information system called GIS (Geographic Information System). These maps complement existing resource inventories and help us better understand the complex ecological makeup of the landscape.

Sustaining Uses and Values

Scientists, citizens, and managers are studying ways to sustain the vitality, resilience, and beauty of the Chattooga's ecosystems.

In ecosystem management, land managers retain and enhance biodiversity, a key value. Biodiversity includes a variety of plants and animals at different stages — from very young to very old.

In addition, ecosystem management selects harvest patterns that mimic those designed by nature.

The very rarest species need special attention. We will identify and protect these species' habitats.

To study these habitats and other resources in the basin, researchers from a range of disciplines will work with us. They will assess vegetation and water quality and survey fish, plant, and other unique habitats.

The product of our efforts: diverse, productive habitat for wildlife and fish, clean water and air, outstanding recreation opportunities, valuable wood products, and long-term stability of the ecosystem.

Collaboration with the Public, Partners, and Researchers

In carrying out the Chattooga basin project, we welcome public involvement and partnerships with State and local governments. A coalition of environmental groups has already helped us develop the initial proposal on the watershed's management. The project now involves several committees with researchers from Duke University, North Carolina State University, Clemson University, and Forest Service researchers and specialists.

How can you get Involved?

Ecosystem management will stimulate changes that won't be obvious overnight. Many questions remain unanswered. Management will continue to adapt as new information becomes available. Because ecosystems are complex and ever-changing, we will always have more to learn. Ecosystem management is not a rigidly charted course, but a journey into new, exciting territory. If you want to get involved in this project, please call or write to:

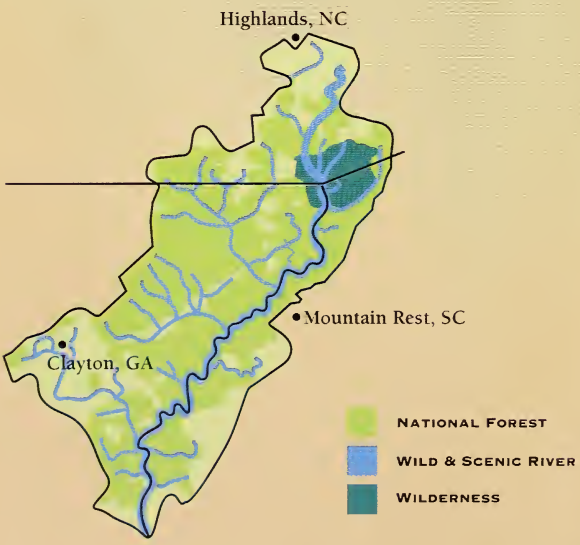
Chattooga Project Coordinator
Dept. of Forest Resources
Clemson University
261 Lehotsky Hall
Box 341003
Clemson, SC 29634-1003
(803) 656-1552

Nantahala National Forest
Highlands Ranger District
Route 1, Box 247
Highlands, NC 28741
(704) 526-3765

Sumter National Forest
Andrew Pickens Ranger District
112 Andrew Pickens Circle
Mountain Rest, SC 29664
(803) 638-9568

Chattahoochee National Forest
Tallulah Ranger District
P.O. Box 438, Hwy 441 South
Clayton, GA 30525
(706) 782-3320

Chattooga River Project



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